History Department Self-Study
Summer 2000
Members Present: Shirley Mullen, Richard Pointer, Marianne Robins

Introduction:

The History Department met for their self study during the week of August 14. They spent three mornings of that week and the morning of September 16 meeting together. Only three members of the department participated in the meetings, since, at this point, we are short our Non-Western historian.

The History Department has been characterized over the years by broad institutional involvement. Besides supervising the History major and the Social Science major (in its two forms), the department contributes to the General Education program of the college through teaching World Civilization, provides significant support to the Europe Semester, and contributes frequently to the governance structure of the college.

Despite these other institutional commitments, the department has given careful thought to providing our history and social science students with a program that will provide them with a wide range of options.

1. Most students take the Standard Track, which provides students with a balance of breadth and depth of content, and with preparation in historical method. We believe that the skills of critical source reading, research, and writing are transferable to a wide range of contexts.

2. For students who wish to attend graduate school, we recommend the Graduate School track. In addition to two courses in historical method, these students are required to study a foreign language, and are encouraged to pursue Major Honors work.
3. Third, we offer the students a **Social Science Single Subject** program that satisfies the state’s requirements for preparation in high school social studies teaching.

4. Fourth, for those who have broad interdisciplinary interests in Europe or Latin America, we offer the **International Studies Track** in the major.

5. Fifth, for students who do not plan to teach history, we encourage them to do an internship to give them experience in the work place to support their history major when they go looking for a job.

6. For all our students, we emphasize the importance of good advising to enable students to take ownership of their own education. In cases where it seems appropriate, we encourage student to double major.

**Standard I: Christian Orientation Standard**

**A. What are we currently doing?**

The history department seeks in a wide variety of ways to enhance students’ knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith and to encourage practices, affections, and virtues which mark those who are deeply Christian. We wish to convey to students the value of historical study for the Christian believer and to invite them to consider the differences their Christian faith might make for their perspectives on the past. Emphasis is placed on seeing Christianity itself as a faith tradition rooted in claims about God’s relationship to history. Our courses often provide opportunities for students to see the evolution of the church in broader historical contexts, enabling them to situate the more particular events of church history within the wider sweep of national or global history. In the process, students may also gain a broader sense of the historical and geographical breadth of the Christian communion of saints. Certainly this is further enhanced through exposing students to a range of Christian devotional materials drawn from many different eras and parts of the world. Our classes also
endeavor to provide students with a comparative framework for understanding Christianity in relation to other world and life views.

Much of the content and many of the assignments of our current courses aim at these ends. Various aspects of the history of Christianity and the history of world religions are covered in courses such as History 146—History of Russia 1700-Present (strong emphasis on the Orthodox Tradition); History 121—Medieval Mediterranean (major coverage of Islam and Byzantium); and History 134 European Intellectual and Cultural History, 1350-1650 (Catholic and Protestant Reformations).

Role play essay assignments in History 7—United States to 1877 and History 8—United States 1877 – Present challenge students to place themselves in the role of real historical figures and in the process to gain a greater sense of empathy for those they study.

Public policy group projects in History 178-California Experience require that students wrestle with the ethical dimensions of contemporary policy issues; hence, students regularly confront matters of tolerance, peace, justice, equity, self-sacrifice and their opposites. The use of novels, memoirs, and personal narratives in almost all history classes draws students into the more affective dimensions of human life, encouraging them to see those they study as "living" people with all the needs, wants, joys, and pains they associate with those in the here and now.

The department's strong encouragement of foreign language study, internships, and off-campus programs further point students towards moving beyond their own "worlds" for the sake of being better equipped not only for the modern workplace but for carrying on the work of God's kingdom in an increasingly diverse, but interconnected global environment.

Finally, History 198—Historical Method, Bibliography, and Research challenges students to develop their own philosophy of history in relation to their current faith commitments.
B. How are we assessing what we do?

Student acquisition of content knowledge in this area is assessed through the typical ways history courses assess other content acquisition: quizzes, exams, papers, oral reports, group projects, etc. In some cases, students are provided with a variety of options for how to demonstrate their mastery of the subject matter. For example, in History 1—Introduction to History, students may choose their own format for presenting some dimension of the history of spirituality in early Modern Europe. Their choices have included preparing CD-ROMs, art exhibits, films, board games, journals, and progress at various stages in the development of course projects. Students are given opportunity to comment on their affective learning through journals and free writes. Faculty also typically evaluate a student’s in class performance including the extent to which his or her presence has been marked by Christian virtues that have enhanced or impeded learning.

C. What do we need to do in the future?

In reflecting upon current practices, history faculty see a number of ways to enhance student learning in the area of Christian orientation. In terms of content, additional emphasis on the role of religion in the modern and postmodern periods of world history (covered in IS 17—World Civilization II) might help to dispel the impression that secularization has made religion an insignificant factor in human cultures or societies. Within the classroom environment, we believe that we need to encourage students more overtly to practice Christian virtues in relation to one another. These would include peace, integrity, hospitality, encouragement, forbearance, and patience. The reward will be the building of intellectual friendships and the fomenting of more authentically Christian learning communities. We also are considering a possible role for service projects as components in our courses so as to make more concrete the necessary connection we wish to make between what we know and how we live.
Standard II: Critical-Interdisciplinary Thinking Standard

A. What we are currently attempting to do to meet the standard?

Ideally, the History program contributes to a student’s critical and interdisciplinary thinking in a range of ways. The History department participates in two explicitly interdisciplinary teaching contexts, World Civilization (taught usually with members of the philosophy department) and California Experience (taught with Political Science), but apart from these contexts, we believe that history as a discipline is itself an ideal framework for cultivating an interdisciplinary perspective on the world.

1. Historical study provides a chronological context for all other study. History provides a general framework within which to organize and inter-relate all of one’s knowledge. It is a natural meeting place for interdisciplinary concerns. (e.g. History 146—Study of The Orthodox Church, thus pointing to the role of religion in Russian history; Use of novels as sources in a number of history classes. For example, History 146, IS 16, IS 17)

2. Studying history invites one to see the multifaceted nature of explanation. It is difficult to think simplistically after giving serious attention to any major historical problem. We seek to cultivate this awareness throughout our classes primarily through the wide range of readings that are required in each class. (See any syllabus.)

3. Working with primary and secondary texts trains students in the careful work of closely reading and contextualizing a document in time and place. Students are also exposed to a wide variety of texts, including autobiography, journal, monograph, memoir, correspondence, etc. (See, for example, History 1, IS 16, IS 17, History 152, History 141, History 171, 173, etc.)

4. Writing history makes one very self aware of the process of narrative construction. Furthermore, writing history requires the careful work of assessing the relative weight to give to each perspective or piece of evidence. In this process, as well
as in studying history, students are required to confront problems of interpretation and strategies for weighing the validity of various interpretations. (See especially, History 1 and History 198)

5. The study of history **creates a healthy skepticism about easy answers or easy solutions.** One is not quick to take any one perspective as the total picture of any situation. (This awareness is cultivated throughout our classes, but see especially IS 16 and History 121 and the comparative projects there described.)

6. History, as a narrative discipline, **invites comparison with other narrative disciplines like English Literature or Religious Studies.** Exploring the nature of historical narrative alongside other narrative literature further clarifies the limitations and possibilities of historical knowledge. (See, for example, History 152)

7. Historical study **requires one to deal with problems of conflicting interpretations.** Historiography (that is the study of how a topic has been studied) is increasingly as much a part of our study as is the “history” of a topic (the study of the constructed narrative—or narratives). (e.g. History 146—use of *Major Problems in Historical Interpretation.*)

8. Historical research and the communication of that research **cultivate the responsible use of sources.** In particular, students are invited to work with sources, from which they will construct a narrative with elements of both synthesis and analysis.

**B. How we are Currently seeking to assess what we are doing?**

The History department employs a range of tools to determine how students are doing in their classes on developing critical and interdisciplinary skills. **First, every class, including World Civilization, assigns essay examinations.** Often the students will be given a number of questions prior to the exam. They will be allowed to make notes on these questions (a one-page limit) and to bring them to the exam. This approach
allows the students to put their energy into synthesizing data and constructing an argument rather than into memorization.

Second, in addition to essay questions, students are tested for mastery of chronology and definition of terms. In defining terms, students are asked to explain the significance of the term in historical context, so that they are linking that term to something larger than a definition in isolation.

Third, students are sometimes asked to write “preparation for discussion” papers. These are assignments where the students are invited to bring to class written material that will be the basis on which they will participate in a discussion. This approach allows them the freedom to focus on gathering their thoughts without polishing the writing. At the same time, it encourages more thoughtful participation in class discussion.

Fourth, students frequently do group presentations. --See, for example, IS 16, History 152, History 173, History 140, IS 17,

Fifth, students are assigned a range of projects that invite them to engage in source criticism. These assignments would range from writing small cards on a primary source, to comparative and annotated bibliographies, to larger more formal research projects. (e.g. History 171, History 173, History 140)

Sixth, occasionally, we have employed formal tools of peer criticism. As part of a larger assignment, students would be asked to have their work critiqued by at least one other student. (See, for example, IS 16, History 134, History 178)

C. Ways in which we would like to make improvement in the area of Interdisciplinary-Critical Thinking

1. We all agreed that we would like to be more intentional about cultivating gracious
discussion in the classroom. For example, we might deliberately affirm students when they practice humility and openness to opinions other than their own. We want to identify appropriate behavior rather than simply to be hard on inappropriate behavior.

2. We want to be more deliberate in helping students to understand what is happening to them in the course of working on various assignments. Instead of merely explaining assignments, we will seek to explain the purposes and objectives that are to be accomplished in the assignments.

3. In both World Civilization and our upper division classes, we could do much more to emphasize a wider range of interdisciplinary connections within history. We have tended to do more with art, religious studies, philosophy and literature than with the natural, behavioral and social sciences. This might happen through additional readings or through doing more with lecture exchanges, etc.

Standard 3: Diversity

1. What are we currently doing?

The department understands history to be, in part, the study of people unlike ourselves and therefore an exercise in comprehension, compassion and empathy. Its goal is to communicate the moral complexity and ambiguity of history and to recognize diversity without resorting to simplistic or reductionist terms. It also seeks to broaden the range of categories available to students for understanding the past, particularly those arising from perspectives grounded in social class, gender, ethnicity and culture.

1. The department curriculum offers students an opportunity to focus on the history of another culture through the International Studies Track of the major. This major includes the requirement that students spend a semester in another culture—one that will allow them to use their foreign language skills.
2. The department actively participates themselves in off-campus programs, most often the Europe Semester and Europe Mayterm. In addition, the department actively encourages students to include off-campus and cross-cultural experiences in their curriculum. These would include the Urban Semester, as well as programs in Europe and Latin America.

3. The department offers a range of courses that are essentially comparative in their approach. These would include History 121 and IS 16. This approach especially facilitates the awareness of diversity.

4. The department is currently development a series of classes on women’s history. So far, the course on American Women has been offered.

5. Any critical examination of primary sources from another culture allows students to reflect on the ways in which class, gender, ethnicity, culture and historical moment influences one’s beliefs, values and practices. Students are explicitly encouraged to reflect on the ways in which their own world views might differ from those of the writers of various texts. For instance, comparative papers in IS 16 (which treat topics such as understanding of spirituality, space and time, order and disorder) require students to identify ways in which their research helped them to better comprehend the formative influence of their own beliefs and practices.

6. Issues of diversity are directly addressed in all American history classes through focused assignments and primary readings, such as the narrative of Frederick Douglass and writings by and about Native Americans. American history and world civilization courses prominently feature women’s history as well, and all history courses draw heavily on the insights and findings of social and cultural history. For example, students are required to reflect on the status of women in all primary texts in IS 16, including the *Ramayana*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Tale of Genji*. In addition, they read texts by women authors such as Julian of Norwich. Secondary sources like Cornell West’s *Race Matters* are also regularly used to emphasize the importance of these topics.
7. In teaching the World Civilization courses, the history faculty emphasize the ways in which the construction of history is contingent upon particular cultural premises and students are expected to “recognize that any formulation of knowledge may be affected in important ways by gender, social class, ethnicity and culture.” The critical examination of primary sources allows for all history classes to examine one or all of those influences. In the World Civilization classes, we seek to critically assess the Grand Narratives of world history, and to draw attention to ways in which a sense of history differs in various world cultures encountered in the class.

8. To the extent that history implies contextualization, it calls attention to all facets of the context and requires students to be culturally sensitive, perceptive, flexible and understanding. For instance, students in World Civilization II are invited to consider the relationship between cultural and Christianity through reading the novel *Silence* by Shusako Endo.

8. The department requires all students in its International and Graduate Studies tracks to take four semesters of foreign language or the equivalent.

D. How are we seeking to assess this outcome?

At present, written assignments and oral presentations are the principle ways in which we seek to evaluate progress in students’ understanding of diversity issues. Since examples of such work have already been given, we will not repeat them here.

E. What could we be doing better?

1. While most students seem generally interested in the problems of diversity, the particular issue of gender is often difficult to approach, and may provoke a defensive response on the part of some students. Overall, students tend to arrive at Westmont with a great deal of suspicion regarding feminism, and may remain blind to many important gender-related issues. Explicit assignments drawing on students’ campus experience might prove profitable. The department hopes to find ongoing creative ways to approach this topic.
2. The department would like to require all of its majors to take a foreign language, and to continue to support opportunities for study abroad.

3. The department will develop its courses in women’s history in conjunction with the effort to bring about a women’s studies minor, possibly in a cross-disciplinary context.

4. The department will attempt to develop more creative assignments to cultivate empathy, such as writing that requires students to embody particular individuals.

5. The curriculum urgently needs to be solidified by the presence of a fourth faculty member whose area of specialty is non-western history. The department is in the process of filling this position.

6. The department will increase the number of courses taught in a global perspective (for example, History 155 on British Imperialism in India) and will seek to offer the non-Western history courses more frequently.

Standard 4: Written and Oral Communication Standard

A. What we are currently attempting to do in this area

History tends naturally to encourage students to write. The discipline itself is built on the ability to communicate in a compelling manner what one has concluded, either in the form of a narrative or an analysis. Oral Communication has tended to be less emphasized in the discipline as a whole, though in our department we are working to make this area of communication increasingly part of a student’s classroom experience.
Written Communication

1. Students write in all history classes. The assignments would include some combination of the following: essay examination, critical and comparative book review, (e.g. History 8, History 141); primary text analysis, (e.g. History 171, History 173, History 140); reading journal, (e.g. History 146); research paper, (e.g. History 141, History 198); perspective essay or role play, (e.g. History 7, History 178); play, (e.g. History 112); personal history, annotated bibliography, (e.g. History 171, History 173); historiographic essay, (e.g. History 198); film analysis, (e.g. History 156); art commentary, (e.g. History 156); outline, report on interview, article summary.

2. In longer projects (e.g. research project), students are held accountable for various stages of the project. Sometimes they are asked to keep a research log. In History 198, students make regular reports about their progress in research and writing. This approach is intended to encourage students to work consistently over the long haul, but also to encourage them to be more self-aware of what is happening to them in the course of the writing. (See especially History 1 and History 198)

3. We are committed to the importance of careful evaluation of writing. All faculty take a great deal of time in working with students papers, not only to evaluate content, but also to evaluate the writing itself. We encourage, even require, “re-writing” whenever that seems possible. In cases of major research papers, this is almost required. That is, students are graded on their rough drafts, and then encouraged to do a complete re-write for an improved grade. (e.g. History 198, History 141)

4. In addition to writing assignments outside of class, department members often employ the practice of “free writing” in class as a means of enabling students to collect their thought prior to a discussion. We are firm believers that clear thinking is linked to clear writing.
5. Dr. Paul C. Wilt and his wife, Doris, have endowed an annual prize for the finest research paper completed in History 198. This is an added incentive for students to put their very best effort into their research and writing.

*Oral Communication*

All department members cultivate growth in oral communication skills, though probably not as regularly as written communication skills.

1. Class discussion is a prominent feature of all our classes. Students are frequently asked to read a text and come prepared to discuss what they have read. Sometimes the discussion is structured by the faculty, and sometimes by a student.

2. In addition, we have made use of a range of assignments in oral communication, including: group presentations, individual presentations, debates, interviews, and oral role plays. (e.g. History 152, History 140, etc.)

**C. How we attempt to assess student progress in this area**

It is difficult to know what to say in this area, besides pointing to the completed assignments themselves. We do attempt to meet regularly with majors over the course of their time at Westmont, and talk with them about their progress and growth over time. The Social Science Majors are required to complete a portfolio of their written work and to be evaluated by a committee of history and political science faculty.

**What we could be doing better in the area of Written and Oral Communication**

1. We could be doing more to explicitly frame questions that invite students to think more creatively about their faith in relation to their development as historians.

2. We could make much more use of peer assessment and self assessment in the
classroom.

Standard 5: Active Societal and Intellectual Engagement

A. What are we currently doing in this area?

The history department is committed to cultivating the aptitudes, and skills within our students that will make them not only active, but effective members of the various communities (work, neighborhood, civic, faith, etc.) in which they will participate in the future. We want our students to become lovers of learning for the rest of their lives, certainly for their own sake, but also for the benefit of those around them, and ultimately, for the kingdom of God. To those ends, history classes point up the value of historical study for one's sense of self; personal identity is clarified by having sharper understanding of where one "fits in" historically and culturally. At the same time, our courses seek to expose more perennial dimensions of the human condition so that students might also see their commonalities with others across time and space and in the process, develop greater empathy, compassion, and humility, perhaps especially for those who either in the past or present have experienced substantial suffering or oppression. We endeavor to enable students to grow in their reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills. All of these are presented, not simply as tools for college, but as tools for life. Departmental advising includes an emphasis on students' developing a sense of Christian vocation so that no matter what our majors pursue in the future, they might see it as a worthy calling from God. We seek to put these values into practice by sponsoring seminars in which alumni of the history program speak to current students regarding possible career paths. Secondly, internships are regularly encouraged so that students might begin to apply their learning in settings outside Westmont and to allow them to explore vocational options that interest them.

A range of course assignments and activities to implement some of the broader strategies and goals identified above. All the American history classes include
substantial coverage of those people groups who have been marginalized in the past because of race, class, gender, or religion. The consequences of that marginalization for contemporary American society are always discussed. History 155—Imperialism and Independence will provide a case study of the impact of imperialism in the non-Western world. History 156—France, 1500—Present, includes readings on political engagement in contemporary France. Students in History 8—U.S. Since 1877 have been asked to do oral history interviews with community residents regarding the latter’s experiences in the Great Depression or World War II. Students in IS 17 are being asked to conduct interviews with people who lived through the 1960’s, as part of a project to understand the 1960’s and Vietnam.

In all these ways, students are being encouraged to make connections between their historical study and their responsibilities within the larger world, now and in the future. The department’s encouragement of a range of off-campus learning programs reinforces its desire to see students expand their cultural horizons, increase their personal independence and dependability, and gain a deeper awareness of globalization. Department Faculty seek to model for their students wide-ranging commitments to lifelong intellectual and societal engagement through their roles in Erasmus Society, off-campus programs, community associations, and presentation of their own research when appropriate.

B. How are we assessing what we are doing?

Students are assessed in traditional ways through quizzes, exams, papers, oral presentations, etc. on course content and skill development apropos to this standard. Those who do internships keep journals. In some courses, students are required to compile a log of out-of-class intellectual experiences that connect with the course content. Because of the relatively low faculty-student ratio in our department, faculty are in a good position to become familiar with individual students’ personalities, abilities, interests, and vocational plans. Intra-departmental dialogue concerning our students, individually and collectively, is reasonably frequent; this dialogue serves as an important means for tracking students within our program and beyond. Contacts with alumni
provide at least anecdotal evidence for how and to what extent our graduates are living out the goals identified in this standard. Those contacts are mostly formal (e-mail has increased the frequency and quantity of these contacts) although Homecoming often provides a more organized time for interacting with alumni.

C. What do we need to do in the future?

Various strategies might help to enhance the history department’s effectiveness in the area of active societal and intellectual engagement.

1. One recommendation is to continue to increase the percentage of our Students who participate in internships and off-campus programs. Both generally provide experiential learning opportunities that assist students in seeing learning as their own responsibility and as a lifelong process.

2. Another idea under consideration is developing some type of service component to one or more courses.

3. The department might also try to become more systematic in following up with Alumni. This may be enabled through the completion of a departmental web page. (Greater use of web-based technology with current students might also be valuable.)

Standard 6: Technology

A. What are we currently doing?

The department is trying to promote responsible and competent use of technology to the extent that this technology is practically relevant to the discipline.

1. Students have used CD-Roms dealing with specific historical topics such as the U.S. internment camps for Japanese-Americans and the conflict in Northern Ireland.
2. The history faculty sets up regular instruction on research tools accessible through The internet, including article databases (such as Project Muse or J-STOR), reference databases (such as Historical Abstracts) or primary sources (such as the Pennsylvania Gazette.)

3. The faculty spends time advising students on using the internet, including its valuable tools. Part of the task consists in redeeming students’ choices from randomness, teaching them to be selective and to approach their internet research with a coherent rationale.

4. The history faculty typically requires papers to be typed and for students to demonstrate a command of word processing. The faculty attempts to be quite specific about requirements (including format) and to emphasize the importance of detail.

5. Specific e-mail assignments have been designed in some sections of IS 17.

B. How do we seek to assess this outcome?

Our assessment of competency in technology is made in the context of the evaluation of assignments in which technology is used.

C. What do we need to do in this area?

1. We will continue to develop our own expertise as faculty in the use of technology in the classroom. Some members of the department will participate in the spring technology workshop.

2. We want to put great emphasis on the historical context for the development of technology. It could historicize technological changes, explore the social and cultural functions of technology, and stress the ways in which technology is still a privilege of rich nations.